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Administrative and pedagogical considerations for collaborative online Korean courses: A case study

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Abstract

This chapter addresses issues and solutions pertaining to pre-COVID-19 online language teaching by presenting a case study in the development and implementation of a cross-institutional, cross-continental hybrid Korean language course. In March 2019 the University of Denver (DU) and the University of Western Australia (UWA) launched a hybrid Korean language course, taught from Western Australia for DU students. This case study offers a unique perspective on the processes, challenges and solutions for successfully implementing a collaboration that promotes access to less commonly taught languages by leveraging available technology and institutional collaborations. Firstly, we review literature relevant to online language learning and teaching. Then, we describe the administrative, organisational and technical details of the pilot course design. Drawing from the teacher's self-reflective journal, we uncover and analyse themes in the teacher experience that provide insight into and considerations for synchronous online Korean language teaching. Finally, we offer additional thoughts for post-pandemic practices.

Keywords: Korean language, online teaching, international collaboration, teacher's perspective, COVID-19

1. Introduction

Language teaching and learning have for many years taken advantage of increased access to tools and innovative shifts in methodologies that have allowed for constantly evolving educational approaches. Principles and practices that are known by many names, such as technology-enhanced language learning (TELL), computer-assisted language learning (CALL) and others, have shifted the way teachers and learners access and engage with linguistic and cultural content and expand their multicultural and multilingual competencies. Once serving as a supplement to traditional face-to-face language instruction, advancements in tools and technologies now offer entire shifts in instructional delivery modalities, expanding the reach of the classroom across the globe. Remote online teaching has been employed to shorten physical distances and create learning opportunities that would have otherwise been prevented by geographical or institutional constraints (Blake, 2005; Guo & Möllering, 2016).

While affordances for both teaching and learning are often at the forefront of discussions about language learning technology, it is critical to also consider the impact on institutional and administrative policies, since these can play a role in who teaches, when and how. Policy changes and institutional support for innovations and collaborations can have important implications for course offerings, program development and student retention.

This chapter addresses issues and solutions pertaining to online language teaching by presenting a case study in the development and implementation of a cross-institutional, cross-continental hybrid Korean language course. In March 2019, the University of Denver (DU) and the University of Western Australia (UWA) launched a hybrid Korean language course, taught from Western Australia for DU students. This case study offers a unique perspective on the processes, challenges and solutions for successfully implementing a collaboration that promotes access to less commonly taught languages by leveraging available technology and institutional collaborations. This project contributes to the literature on distance foreign language teaching by focusing on the cross-institutional teaching of an Asian language (White, 2014). We review some of the literature relevant to synchronous online language learning in the following sections. Then, we describe the design and set-up of the pilot course. Drawing from the teacher's self-reflection journal, we uncover and analyse themes in the teaching experience

that provide insight into and considerations for synchronous online Korean language teaching. We conclude by offering additional thoughts on online foreign language teaching in a post-pandemic era.

2. Online synchronous language teaching

Student–student and teacher–student interaction in online and computer-based foreign language teaching has been popular since the late 1990s. In the early stages, online interaction was limited mainly to written communication (Hampel, 2006), in either asynchronous forms such as emails (Peterson, 1997), blogs and wikis (Thorne & Payne, 2005) or synchronous forms such as text-chat (Tudini, 2003). With regards to oral forms of communication, despite Levy and Stockwell's early observation that 'the value of conferencing in language learning is indisputable' (2006, p. 94), its introduction in classroom practices a few decades ago was constrained by hardware affordability, software quality and connectivity availability.

Now, thanks to advances in software, hardware and the internet, the language teaching field has evolved from costly conferencing classes conducted through a camera and a phone line (Azuma, 2010) to cost-effective and accessible online synchronous instruction. Online language learning activities conducted in a remote synchronous setting have been implemented in several formats. Collaborative wikis and teleconferencing activities, for example, are considered effective multimedia tools to support student learning and intercultural competence (Blake, 2017; Freiermuth & Huang, 2021; Lenkaitis, 2020; Lim & Lee, 2015; Wang, 2015). Besides peer-to-peer exchanges, one-to-one teacher and learner interaction in a format similar to private tutoring was also considered effective (Kozar, 2015, 2016).

Before the online teaching revolution brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, work on online synchronous language teaching focused on the challenges created by the online environment (Lee, 2015; Yu, 2018) and on the use of the hardware, in particular the webcam, by both teachers and students (Codreanu & Combe Celik, 2013; Kozlova & Zundel, 2013; Guichon & Wigham, 2016; Guo & Möllering, 2016). Other studies comparing instruction in offline and online settings demonstrated that online courses taught as teacher-to-class video conferencing, if carefully designed, can deliver results comparable to traditional offline courses (Blake, 2017; Blake & Shiri, 2012; Enkin & Mejias-Bikandi, 2017;

Moneypenny & Aldrich, 2016; Peterson, 2021). Gacs et al., (2020) found that classes conducted suddenly online because of an emergency situation, as was the case during the pandemic in 2020, were not comparable to their face-to-face counterparts because of the impossibility of applying a carefully planned design. The authors concluded that crisis-prompted remote teaching is generally of lower quality, carries testing security issues, difficulty with accessibility and connectivity, and may not fulfil equivalent learning outcomes.

A carefully designed and planned online class does not try to reproduce online the face-to-face environment (Gacs et al., 2020). Instead, it takes advantage of the unique features of the virtual environment to enable student learning. González-Lloret (2020) argued that through collaborative technology-enabled tasks, it is possible to recreate also in the online environment the type of output and interaction needed to effectively learn a language, concluding that technology in the online language classroom opens possibilities previously unavailable in the traditional face-to-face setting. Payne (2020) advised grading online activities depending on their cognitive load to make teaching effective in the virtual classroom, because synchronous communication has a different cognitive load than asynchronous communication and therefore a pre-recorded online video lecture will have a cognitive load lower than a live video chat in the L2.

The careful design of activities is essential to address also the emotional side of the online language learning experience. Even if Pichette's (2009) research did not find any significant differences in the level of foreign language anxiety among online and offline language learners of all levels, in a study conducted during the pandemic, Resnik and Dewaele (2021) found that the online environment weakens language learner positive and negative emotions due to the difficulty in establishing social bonds. In another study conducted during the pandemic among online university students of Korean, Fraschini and Tao (2024) found that the level of enjoyment was consistently higher than the level of anxiety, and that perceived teacher friendliness and increased Korean language use in the virtual classroom were positively correlated to positive emotions. Russel (2020), discussing anxiety in online language learning, concluded that the remote environment could be manipulated to lower speaking anxiety in language learners.

While there is some previous work on video conferencing-mediated instruction and online language teacher training (e.g. Hampel & Stickler, 2005), in the field of Korean as a foreign language, the majority of the

research is focused on the students, their needs and their perceptions of the learning experience, with limited consideration of the teacher experience (Choi, 2017; Choi et al., 2018; Lee, 2015; Lim & Lee, 2015; Lim & Pyun, 2016; Seo & Bang, 2019). This chapter aims to shed light on the teacher perspective by discussing the course design and implementation and analysing the reflective teaching journal of the instructor of a semester-long hybrid course. As illustrated above, considerations such as the teacher's role in planning for course design and set-up, in adjusting the cognitive load of activities and in shaping students' affective response, are important in developing a better understanding of the teacher's experience and point of view. In the following section, we describe the administrative and curricular components that create the foundation and framework for this course.

3. Course design

3.1. Background

At the initiation of the partnership with UWA, DU's Department of Languages and Literatures offered several credit-bearing options for language study (Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hebrew, Italian, Latin, Japanese, Spanish and Russian). In recent years, despite a decline in overall enrolments in the study of languages other than English, the United States has seen a dramatic increase in Korean language enrolments (Looney & Lusin, 2019). This trend was reflected in student requests for Korean language instruction at DU. To meet this growing demand for Korean and other less commonly taught languages, the Center for World Languages and Cultures (CWLC) developed a Directed Independent Language Study program to allow students to pursue self-study in languages of academic, professional or personal interest. With increased interest, the CWLC began to leverage its international strategic partnerships to develop instructor-led language courses. After a successful pilot course for online Swedish language through Lund University, the CWLC began to explore options to offer Korean to DU students through UWA.

Embarking on an international collaboration involving curriculum matching, credit transfers, and the sharing and exchanging of resources is a complicated endeavour, and the development of the course described in this contribution was made possible by institutional policies and large-scale initiatives that encouraged and supported this type of work. DU's ten-year

strategic plan, *Impact 2025*, committed to *Discovery and Design in an Age of Collaboration*. *International Impact* was one strategic initiative intended to support this transformative direction, and the Office of Internationalization at DU prioritised institutional partnerships with universities and increased opportunities for internationalisation on campus. UWA's status as a strategic partner institution, and an existing memorandum of understanding with DU, helped facilitate this project from an administrative and logistical perspective.

3.2. Administrative and curricular considerations

From a curricular perspective, even though the effectiveness of online and hybrid teaching modalities had been demonstrated with appropriate design and implementation (e.g. Goertler, 2011; Meskill & Anthony, 2015), there remained some resistance among the DU faculty to full acceptance and support for the creation of new online language learning opportunities, even in cases where it broadened access to less commonly taught languages otherwise not offered at the institution. In order to receive the necessary approvals to move forward with this project and create a credit-bearing option for DU students to study Korean remotely through UWA, DU and UWA developed underlying policies to ensure academic rigour and include the program in the DU curriculum:

1. The course content in DU's Korean: Beginning Level 1 would match the Level 1 entry unit of the UWA Korean language program (KORE1401).
2. DU's Korean: Beginning Level 1 would be given the course prefix INTZ, indicating that the course was offered through the Office of Internationalization, rather than the academic Department of Languages and Literatures.
3. DU's Korean: Beginning Level 1 would count as elective credit and would not count towards the common curriculum foreign language requirement.
4. For students who elected to study abroad at UWA and continue the Korean language course sequence in person, the second Level 1 Korean language unit of the UWA program (KORE1402) would transfer back to DU and fulfil the common curriculum foreign language requirement.
5. Students who desired to continue their Korean language studies after completion of Korean: Beginning Level 1 could continue to do so at DU through the Directed Independent Language Study program. In this case, credits earned would continue to count as elective credits

only and would not fulfil the common curriculum foreign language requirement, which might incur competition for enrolments with other language programs.

In addition to these curricular considerations, there were logistical challenges for offering a cross-global course via synchronous online delivery. Course meetings were carefully scheduled to accommodate the 14-hour time difference, while ensuring that the meeting times would not deter interested students. Minimum enrolment for language courses at DU is typically set at eight students. However, since this was a pilot program, the institution was committed to running the course with lower enrolment. The final enrolment in the course was nine students, which was considered very strong and promising for longer-term viability, particularly since it was only offered as elective credit. The demonstrated success of the course would create possible opportunities for further curricular integration in the future, allowing students to apply the course credits towards relevant degree programs such as Asian studies, international studies and so on.

To ensure the employment of best pedagogical practices that would set students up for success, we designed a hybrid course solution that would provide learners with multiple modalities for input and engagement with the class content. Collaborative activities were conducted in the online classes through breakout rooms, and opportunities to engage in spoken interactions with peers and instructors were made available through the design of the face-to-face sessions.

Because this collaboration was supported by an institution-level partnership, funding was made available for the course coordinator to travel from UWA to DU for the first week of term to orient students to the course, meet with and train the teaching assistant (TA), connect with the on-site support staff, and get an overall feel for the institution. The initial establishment of a face-to-face connection was helpful for this pilot course, since it allowed the course coordinator to establish a social connection with the students, an element otherwise missing in the online language learning environment (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021).

For the duration of the ten-week academic quarter, the course met for two hours, twice per week. The first session of the week was a synchronous online lecture delivered by the instructor. These sessions covered the main grammar points and related exercises, both written and oral. The second

session of the week was an in-person meeting, facilitated by the TA. The TA-led sessions provided opportunities for reinforcement through more spoken interaction and activities, such as role-plays, reading and listening.

For this course, various course materials were made available to students. The main textbook adopted for the course was *Sogang Korean 1A* (Kim et al., 2008), published by the Sogang University Korean Language Education Centre. To supplement the course text, the instructor uploaded video clips containing concise explanations of grammar points, a PDF workbook for classroom activities, grammar notes and homework exercises with answer keys to the learning management system (LMS) in advance of online and in-person sessions. Online sessions were automatically recorded and shared with students for review purposes.

As an additional resource for students taking Korean: Beginning Level 1, the CWLC hired an undergraduate native speaker of Korean to serve as a peer tutor. CWLC tutors' primary role is to leverage their position as peer experts to help students become more self-sufficient and confident language learners. Critical to this, as Williams (2011) states, is regular and frequent training to prepare peer-educators to serve in this capacity. Drawing from various established tools and practices (e.g. Leons, 2013; Paige et. al., 2002; Thot, 1999; Wood & Tanner, 2012), the CWLC tutors complete training modules that focus on tutoring best practices, strategies for working with language learners, the L2 writing process, facilitating L2 conversations and working with learning differences. The underlying philosophy communicated through the training is that tutors encourage fellow students by modelling and sharing best practices in language learning. The additional support and guidance were an important addition to help keep students engaged throughout their remote learning experience.

Finally, because this was a new course delivery modality for students, CWLC staff were also available on-site to assist students in navigating the course, facilitate communication with the various instructional staff and connect with the appropriate study abroad advisers for possible continued study.

3.3. Software and hardware set-up

The video conferencing platform Zoom was used to deliver the course. This platform was preferred among other options for its audiovisual quality and stability and for allowing breakout rooms, a function used to create

sub-meetings within a primary meeting. This feature was considered essential to the running of communicative language activities, since it enables students to interact with peers also in the online environment.

The venue chosen for delivery of the online classes was a video conference room equipped with a Polycom system. This venue was preferred thanks to its hardware, which offers audio and video quality exceeding that of the more widely available desktop devices. Additionally, the venue offered the possibility of using a physical whiteboard showing background slides without the need to continuously switch from a screen-sharing view to another. Besides the Polycom system, other pieces of hardware used by the instructor included two laptops. One laptop was connected to the beam projector to display the PowerPoint slides, while the second laptop was connected to the video conference system as the meeting host. While these options use a significant number of resources, they allow for a PowerPoint presentation, the use of the breakout room function by the host and the use of high-quality audiovisual equipment such as the Polycom system. The students were able to see at the same time both the slides and the instructor as if they were together in a physical classroom. The instructor experienced no significant technical issues, and the students did not complain about or report technical problems such as poor connection or audiovisual quality.

The nine students enrolled in the course took the weekly online class from different locations. Most of them were at home, while others were in a room in the university library or in a shared space in their dormitory. One student always connected with a smartphone, while the others used laptops.

4. Analysis of the reflective journal

The instructor's teaching journal was intended to foster self-reflection about the main lessons learned in conducting the synchronous online sessions in the ten-week hybrid course. Journal entries, written in the first person, constitute a form of narrative inquiry. Self-narratives in applied linguistics have been used not only to offer a window on identity and beliefs (Norton & Early, 2011, Nunan & Choi, 2010) but also, in the case of teachers' narratives, to provide an understanding of teachers' experiences from their own perspective and serve as a tool for the study of teachers' reality, educational practices and professional life (Barkhuizen et al., 2014). The teaching journal analysed here consists of a total of eight entries, one for

each online session taught. Week 1, which was taught entirely in person, and Week 9 (public holiday) do not have entries. Each journal entry was written on the same day as the corresponding class.

A qualitative analysis of the journal entries was conducted by coding recurrent themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003) and highlighted three main topics: students' participation and feedback, breakout room activities, and managing activities and class time. These three topics were further confirmed by a quantitative analysis conducted with Voyant Tools, which illustrated how the words 'students' (54 repetitions), 'class' (46 repetitions), 'online' (22 repetitions), 'time' (21 repetitions) and 'breakout' (20 repetitions) were among the most frequently used in the journal.

4.1. Student interaction and feedback

The instructor observed the students' behaviour to be different compared to traditional offline teaching settings. The Zoom gallery mode was used to allow students and the instructor to see each other simultaneously, recreating an environment similar to the physical classroom. However, the students could not talk with each other, although they could speak out loud when asking a question. The instructor observed that in the virtual environment created by the Zoom meeting, the students could not support each other's learning and scaffold their peers to comprehension through small private student-to-student talks. In a language classroom, this is a considerable limitation, since two students from the same language background, in a traditional class, often ask and answer quick questions to each other in their mother language without interrupting the flow of the lesson. The result is that the virtual classroom was primarily focused on the teacher, as the only actor with whom students could communicate by asking questions or by replying when called out.

The instructor perceived that the online environment and the audio and video set-up had a significant impact on retaining students' attention. Compared to traditional settings, the instructor observed that students demonstrated considerable attention during all classes, which was surprising considering that the lessons were conducted in the evenings from 6 pm to 8 pm. One of the possible reasons for this high level of attention is to be found in the online environment, which does not allow the learners to understand when the instructor is looking at them and thus creates a sort of panopticon environment. Even though all students always had their webcams on for the entire duration of each class, they were unable

to establish eye contact with the instructor, since they did not know at which specific individual the instructor was looking. The lack of clear visual communication clues directed to the teacher, such as gestures or certain facial and body expressions used in the physical classroom but not picked up on camera, limited opportunities for feedback. This means that feedback, both from instructor to students and from students to instructor, about, for example, the pace of the lesson, was severely limited by the constraints of the online meeting environment.

Additionally, the instructor's feedback on student writing was severely limited by the online environment. Although the instructor could see that students were writing on their notepads and on the exercise booklet, it was not possible to check, for example, the spelling of what they were writing. This represents a further point of difference from the physical classroom, where the instructor can walk around, check what students are writing and give them individual and personalised feedback. Despite the weekly written homework submissions, an issue related to insufficient feedback on writing became evident after the mid-term test, when the students demonstrated they had achieved speaking skills that were more advanced than their writing skills. The issue of feedback on writing in online environments becomes more crucial in the context of languages with non-Latin script. This challenge is further amplified by the layout of the Korean keyboard. Students would need to memorise the position of the Korean letters, but this would be a difficult task for true beginner learners. This issue prevented the students from sharing their writing with the teacher in an effective manner during the classes.

4.2. Time

Another recurrent issue encountered in the online classes was that of time management. The lack of visual cues allowing the instructor to understand the level of students' comprehension perceptibly slowed down the teaching pace as the instructor increased the number of repeated explanations. Consequently, the instructor often spoke more slowly than usual to make sure students were understanding. The instructor also perceived a small delay between audio and video, resulting in the instructor's voice being delivered to the students slightly later than the image. The delay was apparent from students' often-slow reactions to the instructor's prompts. The repetition and slower-than-usual talk negatively affected the amount of time that could be spent on activities, and, overall, less content was covered

in the online classes compared to face-to-face classes dealing with the same material. The need to adjust expectations is common to any online language teaching situation (Gacs et al., 2020), and the instructor realised soon that only 90–95 per cent of the planned activities could be conducted in the virtual classroom. This lesson was considered when adjusting the syllabus for the same course conducted fully online in 2020 and 2021.

4.3. Breakout rooms

Without breakout room activities, students would not have engaged with each other verbally, and the overall online class would have turned into a lecture. Breakout room activities were also fundamental in allowing students to interact and establish social bonds (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021). The instructor randomly allocated two to three students to each breakout room. Students in a room could interact more among themselves.

The main advantages of conducting activities by dividing the students into small breakout rooms are increasing peer scaffolding and enhancing active participation. Students, in particular those sharing the same language background, used the time in the small-group breakout room for comprehension checks and peer scaffolding in their mother language. Breakout rooms enhanced peer feedback and participation, with students proving to be more active in the breakout rooms than in the main meeting room, where most of them remained silent. The use of the breakout rooms facilitated communication and increased opportunities for meaningful oral interaction.

From the instructor's point of view, the use of breakout rooms is not without drawbacks. For example, the instructor has considerably reduced control over what happens in every single room. Additionally, if the instructor is engaged with students in a particular room, it is not possible to give appropriate feedback to students in other rooms. The difference with traditional student pair work in an offline setting is that, by checking all rooms before concluding a task, the time spent on the activity is significantly longer compared to the same activity conducted in a face-to-face setting, which further affects the issue of time management discussed above.

5. Post-pandemic considerations

The pilot hybrid course was run during the DU Spring Quarter, from April to June of 2019, with the intention of offering the course again the following academic year. In the shift from a hybrid to a fully online course modality due to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional issues arose, prompting the need for quick adjustments regarding assessment, writing and course materials. Typing and online assessment became considerable issues, due to a characteristic of the Korean language, which is written with an alphabetic non-Latin script. A third issue—the lack of appropriate e-textbooks—is to be discussed instead within a broader consideration of online language education.

The Korean language is written with a non-Latin script of 24 basic letters. While learners of Chinese and Japanese can type on a keyboard using the Latin alphabet for how a word is pronounced and are then able to select the appropriate character, this is not possible for learners of Korean, since Korean has its own keyboard layout. Unfortunately, learners of Korean in English-speaking countries do not have the layout visible on their keyboards, requiring the use of virtual keyboards on their screens, which are time-consuming and impractical for those just beginning to learn the script itself. This issue can be addressed by restructuring the low-level curriculum to include typing among the learner objectives and providing the students with appropriate software to practise typing in Korean gradually.[1]

Following the consideration that online education should not try to replicate the face-to-face classroom environment (Gacs et al., 2020), online testing should avoid replicating a paper-based piece of assessment on a screen. In line with the concerns about typing in the Korean language, all language assessments for the successive DU and UWA Korean language courses were designed through the respective LMS, but they could not include any type of open-ended item. The level of difficulty of the tests developed during the COVID-19 period and deployed on the LMS was considerably lower than the tests assigned to the previous cohorts. As with paper-based tests, the construction of quality online tests necessitates a bank of assessment items that can be graded for difficulty depending on the variation of the multiple-choice format.

1 Such software, developed in 2021 by the first author, is freely available online at keykorea.vercel.app.

The last consideration of teaching in an online environment concerns the textbook. While, for other languages, e-books may already exist, none of the university-level Korean language textbooks available for English-speaking students were available in this format at the time the course was set up. Gacs et al. (2020) noted that online language teaching is particularly time-consuming, as the development of online classes requires a considerable amount of input. The development of foreign language e-books designed not as a file transposition of a traditional book but as online learning tools on their own terms would represent a significant advantage for teachers.

6. Conclusion

The planning and preparation for the hybrid Korean course and subsequent analysis of the teacher's reflective journal facilitated preparation for the shift to fully online course delivery in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators all over the world to look for solutions to address their online teaching needs effectively (Hodges et al., 2020), and today remote language teaching is seen as a necessity rather than a complement to the face-to-face classroom. Now considered a core teaching competency, experience in designing online language courses has become a requirement for recent language-related academic appointments in Australia—for example, those posted in 2021 in Korean and Japanese studies at the University of Sydney.

Leveraging the available technologies along with the new and widespread acceptance of the affordances of online teaching and learning, we are now better prepared than ever to work collaboratively across the globe to offer access to educational experiences beyond the offerings of a single institution. However, there is still work to be done and improvements to be made. Notwithstanding the advantages of synchronous online learning, this contribution has also shown the need to be aware of its constraints. The first limitation is represented by feedback availability, which is not personalised and whose provision is limited in the online environment. A further limitation of the online environment is the lack of depth of teacher–student and student–student relationships compared with those built in traditional offline classrooms, which can lead to less enjoyable classes (Resnik & Dewaele, 2021). In the online environment, the teacher and students cannot interact before or after the class, since all participants disconnect as soon as the lesson is finished. The only opportunity that students have to ask individual and personal questions is through emails,

and this makes it challenging for teachers to understand the students, their needs and their difficulties. Online office hours, or online peer-tutoring of the kind offered by DU, could provide other ways of overcoming the lack of feedback. Reflections and experiences like those presented in this chapter can contribute to the further optimisation of online teaching solutions and to the broadening of cross-institutional collaborations to boost and expand the study of foreign languages.

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